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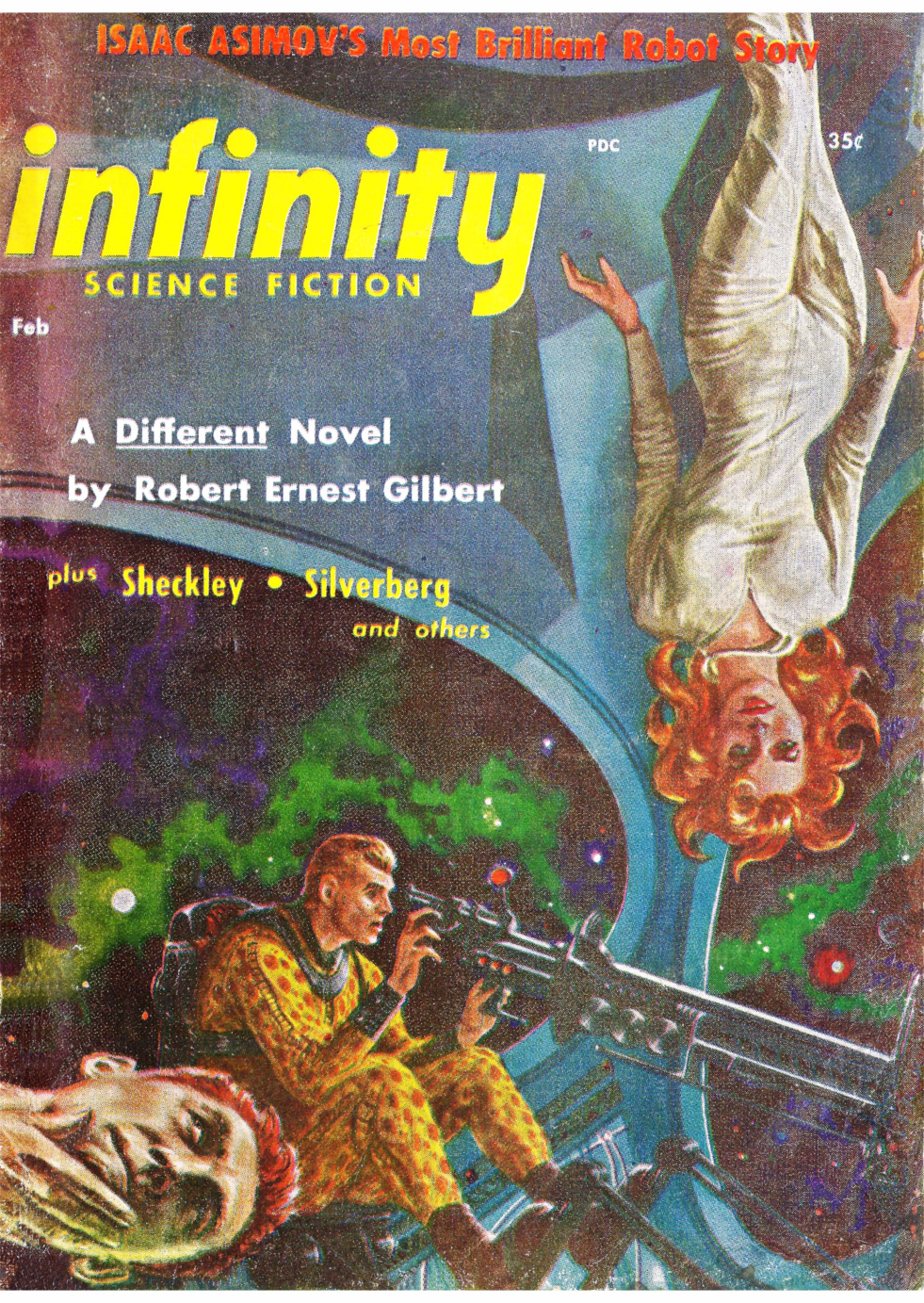
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A Different Novel
by Robert Ernest Gilbert

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and others





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SCIENCE FICTION

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**The hog was deadly dangerous
and virtually invulnerable—
but Planet Maggie's weird
laws were what made the
hunt really tough!**



Illustrated by EMSH

HUNT the HOG of JOE

by ROBERT ERNEST GILBERT

EXCEPTIONAL noses with aquiline bridges and upswept tips marked the six adult couples who drifted past me through the valve into the astraplane, Ap-GG-12C. They were large, tanned, blue-eyed, brown-haired people; and they wore white coveralls stamped, in strange letters, "Recessive—Alien Status." The varied children with them were designated simply, "Alien."

Another big man, almost identical with the male emigrants, but dressed in a spotted fur G-suit, floated out of the old shuttle, *Joe Nordo III*. The astraplane's quadpilot stopped watching dials, turned to the newcomer, and said, "Passenger for you, Ypsilanti. Hunter Ube Kinlock, meet Dominant Olaf Ypsilanti."

"Low, Ypsilanti," I said, fighting my chronic spacesickness.

The shuttle pilot glared at me. My left hand was a graft, my cheek was freshly scarred, and my scant red hair needed treatments; but I had not supposed I was that repulsive.

Ypsilanti said, "Papers."

"No time for that," the quadpilot interrupted. "Unclinch in ninety-three seconds. He's from GG about the Hog. Long, Kinlock. I'll see you in 264 hours."

He urged us through the valves.

On the first deck of the shuttle, I swallowed another SS pill. I was unaccustomed to windows in spacecraft. Eleven hundred kilometers below lay Planet Maggie, of Joe's Sun, with the surface partly in darkness. The awesome, greenish convolutions of the adjacent dark nebula filled much of the sky as if churning forward to engulf both planet and spaceships.

Ypsilanti swung to the controls. I secured my baggage in the racks and clutched a couch. With horror, I saw that the shuttle's brain had been removed.

Ypsilanti snarled, "Ordinance 419: Aliens ride the lowest deck."

I went through a manhole to the lowest deck, the second one, and lashed myself down. "How did that many emigrants crowd in here?" I quavered.

Ypsilanti said, "Ordinance 481: Passengers shall not talk to pilots."

At a signal from the Ap-GG-12C, Ypsilanti unclined and backed the *Joe Nordo III*, reducing orbital velocity until the astraplane was a bright speck. He unstrapped, floated down to my couch, and said, "Papers." I took the GG Travel Book from my chest pocket. The pilot flipped the pages and sneered, "A hunter! Hunt what?"

"Man-eaters. The Jury asked Galactic Government to destroy the Hog. GG sent me. Can't this wait until you ground this thing?"

Ypsilanti exclaimed, "No alien may hunt on Maggie! Shall wait here."

"The 12C won't return for 264 hours!" I yelled. "GG sent me after the Hog."

Ypsilanti laughed. "No aircraft, bombs, men. Slimy thing, one alien cannot kill the Hog. You smell like your owner, Galactic Government. You are not fit to walk on Maggie."

He resumed the controls.

II: FOURDAY MORNING

ALTHOUGH I had previously been spacesick, airsick, carsick, seasick, and sledsick, the descent to Planet Maggie was the first time I believed that Doreen, Laurinda, and Celestine would never again see me alive. How Ypsilanti, occasionally glancing at the few antiquated instruments, found Joetropolis, even in the blundering hours he took, remained mysterious. At last, I saw a clutter of buildings surrounded by a wall. The buildings expanded with dizzy speed, until the shuttle hovered less than one hundred meters above the ground. I gulped weakly at three figures pushing a long metal tube with wheels into a shed

ROBERT ERNEST GILBERT *was born in Kingsport, Tennessee, in those primitive days before toy stores sold kid-sized space helmets, so he made his own by cutting holes in a cardboard box. Since then, he's developed a variety of skills, and has sold stories of various kinds, articles, photographs, cartoons, drawings, and even an airplane design. Now, in "Hunt the Hog of Joe," he combines his talents for satire and suspense in a story that has a surprise and a laugh on almost every page.*

constructed in an angle of the wall.

The shuttle bounced to a tail-first stop. Ypsilanti dropped a door, unreeled a chain ladder, and climbed out.

"Didn't you forget me?" I gasped. I scrambled to the first deck and almost pitched, from the ship. Coarse grass with red undertones covered the field except for patches blackened by exhausts. At one border was a crude shed and a wrecked jet-copter. Cultivated areas, interspersed with patches of brush, separated the spaceport and the walls of Joetropolis. Ypsilanti ran wildly down a rutted lane toward the town.

I located a hoist and lowered my four cases. I eased down the chain ladder to the hot, damp soil of Planet Maggie. Joe's Sun, red and bloated, cleared a clump of trees and half blinded me. Small purple birds jeered from the huge leaves of squat weeds along the edge of the field. Four striped, short-tailed, buck-toothed rodents scurried beneath a stump. Another sat on a discard-

ed can and squeaked threateningly.

Even in the .92 Maggiese gravity, my luggage weighed about sixty kilograms. I yanked the braided leather line from the hoist and was attempting to lash the two smaller cases into a pack, when a distant explosion agitated the still air. Two rodents ran out of the grass and vanished down a hole. As the exploding sounds climbed in pitch, I realized they were mighty grunts.

I unpacked, assembled, and activated the hisser. A soft voice said, "No!"

A woman peeped from behind the shuttle's ruddevator. She bore a faint resemblance to Ypsilanti, but her nose was less prominent. She, too, had brown hair, blue eyes, and tanned skin. She said, "Ordinance 53: Aliens shall approach the city unarmed."

"Low," I said. "I'm Ube Kinlock, the hunter GG sent about the Hog. Are you a port officer?"

"Am a hunter also, slightly. Ordinance 33 forbids introductions of alien males to Maggiese

females, but am Betty Toal."

She stepped from behind the ruddevator. I inhaled sharply. I had encountered colonies not accepting Galactic standards of decency, but was still shocked by extreme exposure. Toal wore a loose, white sack with head and arm holes. Her elbows, knees, and ankles were nude.

Toal stood about one meter from me and said, "Ordinance 31 forbids alien males to be within ten feet of a female. Ypsilanti should have helped you, but is afraid of the Hog. Is little danger now. The Hog avoids the sun."

"That grunting was the Hog?" I deciphered the inscription on the brooch at her throat as, "Minimum."

Toal said, "Yes. The Hog goes to the swamp. Will help with your luggage."

"It's too heavy for you."

"Am thin but strong by Maggiese standards," Toal said.

I managed to carry three cases and the hisser. Toal retrieved a mesh bag, filled with fruit or vegetables, and picked up the fourth case. She asked, as we walked toward the town, "Is true, in the Explored Galaxy, people do not care how children look?"

"What? Children? Yes, generally. Some believe little boys' ears shouldn't stick out too far, and some consider little girls

with golden curls and dimples the most charming, but there isn't much prejudice."

"Is also true," Toal said, "no one must marry someone he dislikes?"

"Sometimes an exchange of x-tops and coupons is involved, but it's usually a free choice."

Toal asked no more questions, but followed along pointing out the ripening crunchies and the blooming goodies. She warned me of toothie tunnels across the path. The striped rodents, she explained, menaced stored food, crops, livestock, and buildings. They were checked, to some extent, by traps, poison, and disease cultures.

A WOODEN bridge, crushed and splintered in the middle, spanned a ditch. The bridge was actually made of sawed boards and beams, not liquid wood castings. The prints of cloven hoofs and dewclaws spotted the soft ground.

"The Hog!" Toal said. "Passed between me and the wall!"

I dropped the cases and clutched the hisser with both hands.

Toal said, "If carry that for the Hog, he has been shot with those. Did not hurt much. Of course, were older models."

Wiping at the perspiration splashing down my face, I knelt and examined the hoofprints,

which were roughly thirty-five centimeters long and spaced, from front hoofs to back, almost five meters apart. "How big is the Hog?" I asked.

"Some sows were nine feet high, fifteen feet long."

We slowly crossed the broken bridge. I said, "What's this about dimensions in feet?"

Toal spoke as if quoting a lesson. "In an old book, Joe Nordo found forgotten English measurements. These matched the Maggiese body. Joe Nordo's feet were one foot long. Center of chest to finger tips, with arm stretched, one yard. First joint of little finger, one inch. Was two yards tall."

Toal suddenly smiled as if unaccustomed to smiling. "Silly," she said. "Learn such things in school." She threw out a hand in a sweeping gesture. "Many things here silly. Is true, in the Explored Galaxy, people do not care if you are blue, black, white? How long your nose is?"

"Yes, officially at least, there's no discrimination between humans and intelligent beings because of physical appearance."

Toal sighed. "Must be wonderful. Wish could leave Maggie."

"Why not?"

"Ordinance 3."

The wall around Joetropolis was made of genuine tree trunks treated with preservative and

sharpened at the top. Heavy, pointed, irregularly spaced stakes, thrust at angles into the ground, fringed the wall. The effect of these crude fortifications was barbaric, even primitive. Bare electrical wires, strung on insulators fastened to the stakes, only accentuated the prehistoric picture.

"Follow the marked path," Toal said.

The zigzagging path was not more than a meter wide. I avoided touching the wires and reached open ground. A small gate in the wall swung inward, and a man wearing a white sack stalked out. He looked like an older brother of Ypsilanti. The two men behind him looked like younger brothers. Their knees and elbows were indecently exposed.

"Are arrested!" they chorused. One carried a hisser so ancient that it could have been the original model. The others had hand weapons.

"I apologize if I've broken your laws," I said, "but I don't know—"

"Ignorance of law is no excuse!" exclaimed the older man, who had "Dominant" on his brooch. He ordered, "Stop Betty Toal!" One of the guards chased the fleeing Toal along the wall.

"I'm Ube Kinlock," I said. "Galactic Government sent me in answer to—"

"Silence, criminal alien! Ordinance 55: Criminal aliens shall never speak, unless so ordered."

III: FOURDAY NIGHT

I SAT UP in the sweltering darkness of the cell. Mortar dropped on the bed from between the logs of the primitive wall. I grabbed a boot to defend myself against rodent but a voice whispered, "Ki ock. Is Betty Toal."

"High, Toal," I said. "What did they do to you?"

"Have not caught me. Brought food and water. Ordinance 102 forbids a meal for criminal aliens. Find the tube? Did they give you water?"

"A few sips." I gulped slightly metallic water from the tube extending through the hole she had made in the daubing. Toal shoved something through the crack. So far as I could determine in the darkness, it was meat between slices of bread.

I munched the concoction and mumbled, "Thanks, Toal. You'd best run before the guards find you. If I ever get out, and you need anything, let me know."

Toal said, too loudly for secrecy, "Am happy to help. Do not worry about prison. Several Maximums and Dominants opposed calling an outside hunter. May be why they arrested you."

"Stand still, Betty Toal!" a

rough voice cried in the dark.

A chorus added, "Are arrested!"

A screech preceded the sounds of rapid breathing, slaps, tearing cloth, and stamping feet. "Stop it!" I yelled, trying to see through the crack. "She only brought some water!"

"Check the criminal alien!"

Soon the wooden hall floor creaked and rattled. The door rolled up. Lights blinded me. Three striped toothies streaked for their holes.

"Search him and the room," ordered a Dominant, apparently the man who originally arrested me.

"You don't get much sleep, do you?" I asked.

"Silence!" he said. "Ordinance 55: Criminal—"

I took up the refrain. "—aliens shall never speak, unless so ordered."

The Dominant created fuming noises. The guards searched futilely. In frustration, the Dominant said, "Where is the weapon she gave? Speak."

I said, "I have no weapons, but I'd like to tell you how Galactic Government will react when—"

They walked out and rolled down the door. I flopped on the bed and perspired and brooded.

On Henderson's Globe of Spica, I had planned to terminate my present career with this

hunt. I had never especially enjoyed the hazards of hunting, which had cost me a hand, much blood, and large areas of skin. Doreen, Laurinda, Celestine, and I had decided to emigrate to Mother Earth. Game wardens, foresters, and gardeners were needed for the century-old project of reclaiming that world. There I would find work more pleasant than pursuing things with tentacles, fangs, and maws. Of course, if I failed to earn a large fee from this hunt, we would be unable to go.

My principal difficulty was that Maggie was private. GG had no authority except to send inspection parties. A private planet could not attempt interplanetary or interstellar flight without GG supervision, nor could it own weapons other than those required for defense against native life. Most private planets had been settled two centuries before, when there were individuals wealthy enough to undertake stellar colonization. Few who tried succeeded. The fifteen or twenty private planets in the Explored Galaxy were all eccentric. Some even advocated capital punishment, an archaic system of killing mental defectives.

The one factor on my side was that no GG citizen could be punished by a private planet—or so Galactic law specified.

IV: FIVEDAY MORNING

TOOTHIES raced for their holes when the Dominant and three guards entered the cell. "Did you get any sleep?" I asked.

The Dominant announced, "Shall see the Jury."

They marched me out into the hot, slanting rays of Joe's Sun. Large, brown-haired, big-nosed pedestrians gawked at me with stolid curiosity. The women carefully kept at a distance of ten foot lengths. We turned a corner and passed a column of varied men and women who did not fall within Maggiese standards. They carried or pushed primitive agricultural tools, such as chain saws, weed burners, and self-propelled soil tillers and sickle bars. Their brooches were inscribed, "Farmer."

We climbed a broad flight of plank steps into a huge log building with wooden pillars and carved friezes. The Dominant said, "Guard him," and passed through one of the many doors in the vestibule.

I examined two flat photographs on the wall. I decided that the Maggiese letters labeled the man as Joe Nordo, and that he had said, "To be alike is to be free." The woman was Maggie Ione Curwen Nordo. Evidently, she had never said anything worth quoting.

Although Maggie was rather pretty, she had features similar to Joe's. Joe was a caricature of most of the natives. His face appeared almost in profile, so that the combination concave and convex bridge of his nose jutted prominently.

The Dominant came through another doorway and motioned. The guards ushered me into a room where Betty Toal sat between two more guards. Dirt smeared her face and her torn white sack.

"Low, Toal," I said. "What—"

The Dominant said, "Planetary Ordinance 104: Criminal aliens shall not speak to fallen Maggiese females."

"Can't you do anything but gibber Ordinances?" I yelled. "Toal only gave me some water. If you—"

Leather bands snapped around my wrists. The guards tied me to rings in the wall. The Dominant strapped a harness under my jaw and across the top of my head. I tried to talk, but all that came past my clenched teeth was, "Effhyu hink hyu kun—" and I stopped.

Someone called, "Criminal Minimum Betty Toal!"

Toal left the room between her guards. She returned, in not more than fifteen minutes, alone. She wore loose white coveralls stamped, "Recessive—Alien Sta-

tus." As she passed me, her teeth flashed in a glad and grateful smile.

V: FIVEDAY AFTERNOON

ABOUT two hours past noon of Planet Maggie's twenty-seven hour day, a man called, "Criminal Alien Ube Kinlock!"

Surrounded by guards, I stiffly walked into an auditorium with a high, peaked ceiling supported by heavy wooden beams. A few spectators sat in rows of wooden benches. Tall windows stood open, and mechanisms with rotating blades fanned the air, but the room was stifling. Toothies chased each other across the beams.

At the end of the room, a man sat in a high box. As we approached, I saw that he was a replica of the Joe Nordo portrait in the vestibule. Carved in the molding around the top of the box was the legend, "His Perfectness, Spencer Gaius Quesnay, the Joe Nordo Ideal."

The guards halted and made peculiar gestures, swiftly touching their foreheads with extended hands. One announced, "Your Perfectness, we bring Criminal Alien Ube Kinlock."

Behind a long desk below Spencer Gaius Quesnay's box sat five men—large, tanned, and well provided with noses. A placard identified the man in the

center, who had gray in his hair, as, "Foreman Maximum Rory J. N. Eijkman." He said, "Criminal Alien Kinlock broke many Ordinances." He picked up a paper and read from it. "Broke 320 by refusing to show papers to the shuttle pilot, Ypsilanti. Broke 419 when attempted to ride the upper deck. Broke 481 by conversing with the pilot."

The list of my defections grew. My movements had been observed from the wall by something called scopeplate. Any slight suspicion that I had flaunted an Ordinance was assumed to be proven fact. Even my use of the cargo hoist was criminal, and my relationship with Betty Toal was filled with offenses. I grunted indignantly in the head harness, but no one listened. Perspiration drained from my body.

After weary minutes, Eijkman read the last of my foul deeds, which was speaking to Toal in the outer room. Eijkman said, "Because of many crimes, suggest he be charged with breaking 792, which covers disrespect to people and customs of Planet Maggie."

An unusual noise came from the spectators. I twisted my head and saw that they were slapping the palms of their hands together.

Eijkman glanced at the other men behind the desk. He frown-

ed at me and said, "Were you Maggiese, should recommend that you be reduced to Farmer. Are reportedly an agent of the creeping monster, Galactic Government. Were sent to kill the Hog. One alien with nothing but small weapons cannot kill the Hog. Am always opposed to asking Government aid. So—"

A man named Maximum Qasim Pierre Macready, according to his sign, exclaimed, "Foreman, object! If the Hog is not killed, may as well find another continent or island. If this alien—"

"The case concerns the alien, not the Hog," Eijkman said.

"Think it silly for an entire population to be scared by the Hog!" cried J. N. Zengo Bartok, a man leaner than the others. "The alien is a well known hunter. Suppose—"

Eijkman said, "Order!" He glared at me. "Sentencing the alien would require appeal to foul Galactic Government. Recommend deportation."

I had anticipated being dragged away to a gas chamber, or an electric chair, or some other savage torture device; but I still did not like Eijkman's decree.

Eijkman said, "Ordinance 30: Alien tourists shall not stay on Maggie longer than one week. That is, nine days or 243 hours. Must be above air by 26:47 Threeday night."

Bartok objected, "Have not passed the decision!"

Eijkman ignored him. "Since no plane will be in space then, time must be extended."

"Uh—ah, yes, must," said His Perfectness, Spencer Gaius Quesnay, the Joe Nordo Ideal, as he leaned from his box. "Er, should not force the—um—alien to leave without a plane."

Bowing to the box, Eijkman told me, "As His Perfectness explains, must wait here for the Ap-GG-12C. Will return at about 20:50 next Fourday. Shuttle blasts at 18:00."

"Foreman," Bartok again interrupted. "Should see if this alien can destroy the Hog, however long it takes."

The other Maximums began commenting. I fumbled with the head harness. The guards restrained me, but Quesnay gestured from his box and mumbled above the din, "Let, uh, the alien—ah, speak. Would like to, uh, hear him."

The guards removed the straps. I massaged my chin and croaked, "Your Perfectness." I cleared my throat noisily. "Your Perfectness, I agree that I should hunt the Hog."

"What, ah, is he saying?" Quesnay grumbled. "Cannot understand a, uh, word."

I spoke more distinctly. "I'll be happy to leave as soon as the Ap-GG-12C returns, if you'll let

me hunt the Hog while I'm here. I'll guarantee to kill him, if you cooperate, but with three conditions."

"Of course, conditions," Eijkman said hopefully.

"According to GG regulations, I must investigate the place of a carnivorous life form in the bionomics of a planet or continent and decide if destroying it would be harmful."

"Can doubt the Hog should be killed?" Bartok yelled. "In three years, he and sows have killed 237 Maggiese!"

Foreman Eijkman sneered, "Can import more hogs. The continent swarms with them. Since Criminal Alien Kinlock believes should not kill the Hog—"

"I didn't say that!" I almost snarled. My feet throbbed from too much standing. "I'll give an example, also about hogs."

"Many centuries ago on Mother Earth, in a place called Sumatra, there were animals like the hellcat of Four, Alpha Gruis, except they were smaller and had stripes. These cats sometimes ate men, but hunters liked to kill them whether they were man-eaters or not. As the cats decreased, the wild hogs in Sumatra increased. The hogs started eating the crops, mostly some plant, called palms, from which oil was taken. The hogs practically destroyed the econ-

omy of Sumatra, because the cats, which had checked the hog population, had been destroyed."

Bartok said, "Clever fable. All the Hog eats is us and domestic animals. And killing him will not destroy his species."

"I'll accept that," I said. "The second condition is that I must learn if the Hog has near-human intelligence, and if we can communicate with him."

Eijkman laughed harshly. "Communicate? The Hog has no intelligence."

"Very well. The last condition is that you must pay my fee, since this private planet makes no donations to Galactic Government." I impulsively doubled my rates and said, "My fee is one thousand x-tops, fifty coupons, to be paid when I've killed the Hog."

Eijkman said, "Gangster!"

Macready said, "Give him platinum bars. Have too many now."

I raised my voice above the arguing. "There's a standard form in my Travel Book. It relieves GG of any consequences and guarantees that I be paid. It must be signed by the highest authority on the planet."

"The Jury is head here!" Eijkman said. "Order!"

His Perfectness mumbled from above, "Give, uh, the alien the form."

Eijkman looked as if he had

swallowed something sour. He muttered, "His Perfectness suggests Criminal Alien Kinlock get the statement. Vote."

The other four Maximums nodded. Eijkman said, "Am opposed. Four to one."

Quesnay said, "Good—uh, give the uh statement. Guards, huh, find his baggage. Take him, er, to Dominant Rasmussen."

Eijkman growled at me, "Will leave this planet at 18:00 o'clock Fourday!"

VI: FIVEDAY EVENING

BY THE TIME my papers had been located and the form filled and stamped by the Jury, and my luggage had been found and loaded on a three-wheeled cart, Joe's Sun was setting. A guard, who talked enough to reveal that his name was Smith, guided me through the stifling streets. Already the dark nebula was visible, and thunder-clouds on the horizon added to the possibility that the sky was having convulsions.

Smith helped me pull the cart up a ramp to the planked walk of the outer wall. Guards stood at intervals and peeped through infra-red goggles or checked strange instruments. Some laughed after we passed. We crossed a bridge to the second story of a log building. Smith beat the door with his knuckles, until a

girl, an adolescent edition of Betty Toal, opened it. "Fine weather, Minimum," she said.

Smith asked, "Dominant Rasmussen here?"

"Yes—" The girl became aware of what I was and backed away to a legal ten foot length.

The guard helped deposit my cases inside the doorway. A huge, white-haired old man lumbered into the hall. He supported his obesity with a wooden rod curved at one end. "Dominant Alcaeus Rasmussen," said Smith, "Alien Hunter Ube Kinlock."

Rasmussen's Maggiese nose tilted at the end so that the nostrils almost paralleled the plane of his puffy cheeks. His chins concealed his neck. "Was warned would come here," he grunted. "Eat. Then we talk of the Hog."

I said, "Thanks," and turned to Smith, but he was gone.

Rasmussen ushered me into a wood-sheathed room. A toothie thrust his striped head from a crack, squeaked once, and withdrew. About fifteen people sat at a table. Sighting me, one woman screamed, and all the females, including a girl about eight, pushed back their stools. "Sit down," Rasmussen commanded. "Will be no menace here."

Rasmussen placed me at a small table in the corner and occupied a stool opposite me. He

said, "Ordinances forbid close contact between alien males and Maggiese females. Eating together, too dangerous." A young man set a plate and cup before Rasmussen, who said, "Emilio, serve the alien also."

Emilio furnished me with a bewildering assortment of bowls, cups, plates, and utensils, while glowering as if I had stolen his x-tops. The soup smelled somewhat like the preservative on the city walls, but I was too starved to care. "Do you know Betty Toal?" I took time to ask. "I seem to have caused her trouble with the authorities. I want to help her if possible."

"Needs no help," Rasmussen said. "Has reached her goal. With your assistance, has broken laws until must be deported. Was scheduled to marry the pilot, Olaf Ypsilanti."

"Marry Ypsilanti!" I choked on the soup.

"A fine man," Rasmussen said. "The girl's reaction is odd."

I started on a mixture containing cubes of meat and exotic vegetables. The people at the large table had stopped eating and fixed me with disconcerting stares. I said, "It's hard to tell you people apart."

"Those are children, grandchildren, in-laws," Rasmussen explained. "All true Maggiese resemble each other. Is the Joe Nordo Plan. Someday, except

for age and sex, all Maggiese will be alike."

"I thought Planet Maggie had only been settled two centuries. You surely must have developed new genetic techniques for everyone to be this much alike so soon."

"No. Hereditary Controls Council hunts new ways. Attempt to count and identify human genes with devices they invented. Plan all marriages and calculate appearance of offspring. Much guessing. Still have Mongoloids, 'blonds, even red hair." Rasmussen glanced at my red hair.

I ate coarse bread and drank juice with unknown flavors. I asked, "Why make such a bother over looks?"

Rasmussen frowned. "Joe Nordo said, 'To be alike is to be free.' When men are exactly the same, envy, suspicion, prejudice, other evils vanish. Already Planet Maggie stands alone. Only true democracy in the Explored Galaxy. Jury is chosen by the people. Ordinances these men provide must pass in referendum with a ninety per cent majority. Farmers, of course, do not vote. His Perfectness the Joe Nordo Ideal is but an honored figurehead, the man who most resembles Joe Nordo."

I said, "The people actually vote for these stu—uh, for these Ordinances?"

"Of course. Their right."

Outside, the sky was now completely dark except when streaked with chains of lightning. Rumbling thunder rattled the windows.

VII: FIVEDAY NIGHT

AFTER DINNER, Rasmussen led me to his "den." I had expected a cave, but it was another wooden room. The advance winds of the gathering storm stirred the cloth around an open window and ruffled papers on a carved desk. I turned left, jumped convulsively, and clawed for imaginary weapons.

A pair of tiny red eyes peered from beneath flopping ears. From either side of a truncated snout, two yellow tusks jutted upward. Grayish-brown, creased, tuberculated skin sprinkled with stiff hairs covered a monstrous head at least a meter and a half wide and two meters long.

I recovered enough to see that the horror was mounted on a plaque above a stone arch. Rasmussen eased his enormous body into a strong chair. He gestured at the head and explained, "A sow. The Hog is larger. Snout is almost solid bone. Skin two inches thick, filled with horny plates harder than many metals. Almost impervious to our hisses."

I said, "I've seen strange ani-

mals, but this thing— Maybe it's the width of the jaw, and the close-set eyes, and the way the snout tilts up. It looks like something horribly human." Suddenly, I realized that it resembled Rasmussen.

The old hunter closed the window against the first cool breeze I had breathed on the planet. Rain splashed the transparent panes. Rasmussen said, "Maggiese hogs are not true swine. No one has examined them much. Who cares? Could be marsupials or unique. Similar appearance is an evolutionary coincidence, quite often seen in the Explored Galaxy."

He pointed to an antique weapon in a rack with other arms. "Only rocket rifle on the planet. Found it in the museum. Two hundred years old. Some of the rockets fired. Others were duds. Used it to kill five sows and twenty pigs. Now the rockets are all gone. Type is no longer made. In any event, laws forbid importing. Trapped, poisoned, shocked, and shot the other four sows and twenty-one pigs. Betty Toal—do not understand her—Betty Toal killed four pigs."

I said, "She mentioned that she was a hunter." I considered Toal for a moment and asked, "How may I contact her?"

"If insist, shall show you her house tomorrow."

Since the old man evidently disapproved of the topic, I abandoned it and examined the rocket rifle, a clumsy device that seemed ready to fall apart if anyone dared to fire it. I said, "I'd think you'd import all sorts of weapons when the hogs have killed 237 people."

"Two hundred thirty-eight. Killed a Farmer this afternoon. We follow the Joe Nordo Plan. Nothing may draw us from it. Build comfortable houses not used elsewhere for a thousand years. Our food has not been known out there for five dark centuries. Speech is simple, not slurred and wordy." Rasmussen removed a long weapon with a graceful wooden stock from the rack and said, "Had some success with firearms."

"Firearms?"

Rasmussen displayed a metal tube with an attached point. "Nitrocellulose in this shell explodes. Drives the bullet through the barrel."

"Noisy," I supposed. "Don't you have some big ones mounted on carriages?"

Rasmussen juggled the firearm but avoided dropping it. Deep wrinkles creased his brow. Thunder rumbled and shook the window. The hunter said, "Is the largest yet made."

I said, "Tuesday—no, Four-day morning, when the shuttle was grounding, I saw some men

pushing something with a long tube, and wheels, and trailing pieces. I was too spacesick to care about it, but it could have been one of these firearms, a big one."

"Where?"

"They were putting it in a building in a corner of the wall. Near the gate facing the spacefield, I think."

Rasmussen sat looking at me and chewing his lips. He shook his fat head and purred, "Must be tired. Must rest until morning. Then we find the Hog."

I protested that I had questions about the habits of the Hog, but he took my arm and escorted me into the hall. He pointed and said, "Your room and luggage." The floor boards groaned under his weight, as he passed through a doorway.

The room contained only a cabinet, chair, and bed. A smaller adjoining room was furnished with what seemed to be cleansing facilities. I finally found Emilio, or his twin brother, and had him explain the Maggiese system, which involved lathering and soaking in a small tank of water.

Refreshed, I reviewed the sketchy research I had done on Henderson's Globe, Spica System. With no time to indulge in ponderous interstellar communication before leaving for Maggie, I had gathered but few facts, and they might not apply, since

Rasmussen said the Hog was not actually a hog.

I projected a booklet with the mighty title, *Initial Experiments in Earthian Swine (Sus scrofa) Production on Freesphere*. If hogs were as delicate as this booklet pretended, I wondered how a similar animal could become an indestructible man-eater. On Freesphere, hogs wallowed only in clean plastic tanks and lived under healthful domes. Their food was carefully compounded and measured. They were constantly inoculated and treated for diseases, some of which were, even today, virtually incurable. They were protected from temperature extremes and from sunburn and sunstroke. The booklet warned that overexertion or over-exposure to sunlight might cause a hog to have convulsions. It sadly concluded that Freesphere was unsuited to hogs, except under the most expensive conditions.

I read further in my one-volume edition of Witos' classic *Natural History of Ninety Planets*, but even that old-time genius was uncertain about the Maggiese hog. He suggested that, unlike omnivorous swine, it was totally carnivorous, rooting up small burrowing animals or catching larger forms, and speculated that, under standard gravity, it might weigh twelve metric tons. Galactic Government zo-

ologists listed the hog as a probable beast.

Whatever the Hog's nature, I felt that I could kill him by the most effective method of destroying nearly any life form, perforation. The Maggiese had failed by using crude weapons.

VIII: SIXDAY MORNING

SEVERAL rodents crossed the gravel street. I said, "These toothies are a problem, aren't they?"

Rasmussen wore a mottled green and brown sack and stockings gartered above his knees. An eyeshade projected from his forehead. "Not so many as once," he panted. "Sometimes gnawed down houses."

Rasmussen carried a firearm on a strap over his shoulder. I carried the hisser, the robotic, and a pack containing many items often useless but sometimes essential. Joe's Sun glinted into our eyes through cracks in the wall ahead and sparkled on puddles of rainwater.

"Betty Toal lives here," Rasmussen said. He struck his stick against a door in a long, log structure with identical doors spaced at ten-meter intervals. He tried the handle and said, "Not home. Probably has gone to her garden."

We walked on down the street. I said, "An air hunt will

be best. It's a good way with large animals."

Rasmussen said, "Saw the wrecked jetcopter at the field? The shuttle would be a poor way to hunt."

"No aircraft on the whole planet? Well, then, a car."

Rasmussen pointed to a man passing on a muscle-powered vehicle. "Have tricycles, but am too old to pedal. Ride a tractor to likely places. Then will be afoot. Mine are flat."

"On foot!"

An uncanny contrivance, such as I had never imagined possible, waited near a wide gate. It had twelve wheels, four small ones in front and in back, and four large, lugged ones in the center. A confusion of rods and bars connected the lugged wheels to double cylinders on either side. Smoke puffed from a pipe atop the round body of the vehicle.

A tired, worried, red-haired man stood on a rear platform and adjusted levers. Although he contrasted completely with the standard Maggiese, he seemed familiar. I then realized that here was a man resembling me.

A woman, dressed in a costume like Rasmussen's, sat in one of the front seats. The old hunter sighed and said, "Fine weather, Betty Toal."

Toal smiled and said, "Low, Rasmussen. Low, Kinlock."

"Why break Ordinances," Rasmussen cried, "until must be deported? Ypsilanti is a fine man. Must go to this extreme? Reconsider the marriage. Let me try to use any influence may have, to re-instate you."

"No, I'm leaving," Toal said.

"Are you all right, Toal?" I asked. "I apologize for causing you trouble. If there—"

"No, no, Kinlock. It was deliberate on my part."

Rasmussen said, "Must not change your Maggiese accent. Even if you go, must remember our ways."

"People out there don't speak Maggiese, and I'm going to stop it. I've been practicing for a year."

Rasmussen said, "At least, Betty, do not make this hunt. Shot pigs, but this is the Hog. Must stay."

"I'm going with you."

"Ordinance 36 forbids male aliens and Maggiese females to ride in the same tractor."

"I no longer obey Ordinances."

Rasmussen puffed out his cheeks and expelled air in an irritated hiss. He glowered at Toal and me and said, "Cannot insure the safety of either. Climb aboard, then, Alien Kinlock."

Toal moved over in the back seat. I heaved my weapons and pack to the platform. Rasmussen took the front seat. I followed

him up the short ladder and sat beside Toal. Her elbows were nude, but leather stockings concealed her knees and ankles.

"This is a tractor?" I said. "What is it?"

"Steam engine," Toal answered. "Burns crude oil. Water is carried in this tank around the boiler. The steam pushes the pistons, and the rods turn the wheels."

I shook my head in amazement and wondered why no one had invented a steam engine before.

The red-headed man, who wore a Farmer brooch, walked alongside. "Dominant, the tractor has full steam," he said. "Fire is on automatic."

Rasmussen sneered at the Farmer. "Hope, Yuko, no more failures occur. Your work has been poor."

Yuko touched his forehead with extended fingers and stepped back. Rasmussen pulled a lever and gripped the steering wheel. With a slow chugging noise, the tractor crept forward and, at a rapidly increasing speed, moved through the gate and a gap in the outer defenses.

"Rather noisy!" I yelled.

"Yes!" Toal screeched. "The Hog will hear us miles away!"

"What are miles?"

"A mile is 5,280 feet!"

"I see!"

Trailing a plume of steam, the

tractor puffed somewhat majestically along a dirt road. Toal began a question and answer game, conducted in shouts, about things and affairs in the Explored Galaxy. She asked about tridie, the ultrabrain, astraplanes, and Galactic Government. She asked for more information about marriage customs and about the reasons for women's fashions always concealing elbows, knees, and ankles while often providing scant cover elsewhere. Some of her questions were difficult to answer.

THE TRACTOR now rumbled through a woodland, rank with gnarled trees crowned by gray-green leaves, and abruptly rolled into open ground with a small, walled village in the center. Rasmussen stopped the tractor. The torsos of several men appeared over the top of the wall. They looked odd, for a moment, since two were bony, and one had black hair.

Rasmussen yelled, "Have you seen the Hog?"

A skinny man said, "Fine weather, Dominant. Heard him at 25:30 toward the swamp."

Rasmussen steered the tractor along a road that circled the wall. Nausea from the vehicle's motion crept over me. The ride was especially disconcerting, since the four leading wheels pivoted under the seats and gave

an illusion that the tractor was leaving the road on curves.

"What is that place?" I shouted. "I thought Joetropolis was the only town!"

"Young Farmer School!" Toal yelled.

"What's it for?"

"Young Farmers come here for training when they're five! At twenty-two, they're sterilized and go back to Joetropolis!"

I shuddered. "This perfect democracy is a bit harsh!"

"The people vote for Ordinances!"

"Farmers don't vote!"

"No, but their parents do! Suppose it is horrible!" Toal admitted.

Rasmussen turned to us, leaving the tractor to find its own way along the twisting road. He said, "No need to discuss customs with the alien!"

"Watch it!" I yelled.

Rasmussen rotated and steered the tractor away from a jumble of boulders. I perspired against the wind of our motion. Toal said, "Children can choose to be deported! Their parents advise them! The parents can be sterilized and stay here, or they can become aliens and be deported with the child! Must not have other children if one is suspected of being a Farmer! Must wait five years!"

Rasmussen brought the quaking machine to a halt on the crest

of the highest hill yet encountered. The cultivated fields were behind us. Here, stumps covered the slopes, but young trees had been planted in rows to replace the vanished forest. Silence rang in my ears. Then I heard calls and whistles from unknown wildlife.

Stiffly, the fat hunter descended to the dirt track. Pulling my sunhat down and lowering the screen against the increasing heat and glare, I followed. I wore my lightest oversuit, but it seemed as heavy as frigid zone garb. The only blessing of the environment was that no insects or related pests were in evidence.

Rasmussen walked to a patch of plants with round, purple-veined leaves and yellow stems. He pointed with his carved stick and began a lecture. "On the western skyline, the sea. There, the cliffs. That silver thread, inland about three miles, the waterfall into the Baby Maggie River. Three hundred yards wide, full of rocks and currents. Misty cloud in the east is the Joe Junior Swamp, where the cliffs end. Swamp extends along the coast ten miles." He extended both arms and proclaimed, "Joe Nordo chose this protected peninsula to settle. Ocean full of reefs, flesh-eating fish, reptiles, currents."

I asked, "Then how did the hogs come in?"

"That gap in the cliffs. Caused by an earthquake ten years ago. Three years ago, His Perfectness suggested the landslide be used to bring timber. Pontoon bridge was floated across the river. Farmers began leveling the landslide to make a road. One night, the hogs came down the path. Sank many pontoons in crossing. Ate two Minimums and one Dominant who were stationed there."

Moving back to the tractor, Rasmussen said, "Walled the gap and removed the bridge. Hogs ravaged the land. These three years have been the worst, since the grizzly apes—" He heaved himself into the seat. "Must move on. Cannot hunt all day and camp here."

I climbed up beside Toal. "What about apes?" I said, but the old man started the tractor, and the noise smothered my question.

Rasmussen steered downhill, and, at the bottom of the slope, pulled a lever to its limit. The puffing of the machine became a throbbing blast as speed increased. "What are grizzly apes?" I shouted at Toal.

"The apes were all killed in Joe Nordo's time!" Toal screamed. "Threw rocks and hit people with clubs!"

"GG doesn't like that!" I said. "You can't exterminate an intelligent species! You're sup-

posed to negotiate with them!" I put my hand on Rasmussen's shoulder and bellowed, "Please slow it down!"

The old man awarded me a deadly glance. The steam engine's wild panting subsided, and the tractor crept along the road, which had dwindled to tracks sometimes covered by red-tinged grass.

I said, "I hear that Joe Nordo wiped out some intelligent apes."

Rasmussen said, "Betty Toal, no reason to teach this alien history. Killing the apes was necessary. A menace."

"So's the Hog," I said, "but I don't fully believe the Jury's claim that he has no intelligence. He's been clever enough to avoid being killed for three years."

Rasmussen braked the tractor so quickly that I fell across the front seat. He growled, "Hogs killed my first wife and two sons. Killed nearly all my old friends. Am the oldest man left on the planet."

Toal said, "Killed my parents. Everyone in Joetropolis lost friends or relatives to the hogs." Tears welled from her blue eyes and slid down her brown cheeks. "More horrible," she sniffed, "that most were eaten. Why should you care for the Hog, Kinlock? Hunting is your business. Get a large fee for destroying him."

"Shall return?" Rasmussen snarled.

Toal produced a square of white cloth, wiped her eyes, and then blew her nose. "No," I sighed wearily. "Show me the Hog—any range up to two thousand meters—and I'll kill him."

IX: SIXDAY AFTERNOON

WE ATE LUNCH under the convoluted branches of a vinetree, having left the tractor on a trail a kilometer away. Surrounding us, except for occasional clearings filled with red plants, the great vines twisted in a confusion penetrated only by paths as entwined as the trees.

Rasmussen had scarcely spoken since our debate. Toal remained icy, although the air was asphyxiating. In an effort to keep the halting conversation from the Hog, until my companions were calmer, I said, "I still don't understand how Maggiese came to look so much alike in only two hundred years."

Rasmussen grunted and chewed a bread and meat ply. Toal studied the green birds that chased through the fringed leaves of the vinetree.

I said, "I recall a few figures about heredity. The chance of any single individual being born from a union is about one in

two hundred fifty million. If the parents differed in only twenty dominant genes, this individual would be one of more than a million possible variations. It's hard to produce specific humans to order.

"Say you're trying to rid a population of an undesirable trait. If twenty-five per cent of the people show the trait, and none are allowed offspring, it would still take three centuries to bring the incidence of the trait down to one per cent, because many people would carry it as a recessive characteristic. Then, mutations may be undetected for generations and upset the whole system. Joe Nordo must have—"

"There he is!" Rasmussen gasped.

"Joe Nordo?" I said stupidly.

"The Hog!" Rasmussen produced an optical instrument consisting of a small telescope for each eye. He said, "Two hundred yards off!"

I jumped up, tripped over a root, fell, crawled to my equipment, and yanked out the quadpod. I set the quadpod close to Rasmussen, lifted the robotic into position, and threw the switches to maximum. "One shot," I predicted. "Explosive pellets with nitrobenzene. Where is he?"

Rasmussen pointed. I swung the robotic and illuminated the

sight. In a little clearing, the Hog rooted at a clay bank. His scaly, dull red skin hung in folds and creases about leg joints and shoulders. His straight back terminated in a twitching tail at one end and, at the other, sloped abruptly in a short neck that lowered the snout almost to the ground.

I adjusted the sight to precise focus and reached for the main switch. Something exploded close to my left ear.

"Shot the monster!" Rasmussen cried. He thrust another tube into his firearm and raised it to his shoulder. A thin puff of smoke and a second explosion burst from the barrel. "Again!" Rasmussen exulted.

"What are you doing?" I roared. "I was ready to kill him, and you started exploding that thing!"

The clearing was now empty. A nearly human squeal lingered in the warm air.

"Go find the carcass," Rasmussen said. "Am too old for hiking. The Hog did not stay long in the sun. Were too slow."

Mumbling, I pulled a ranger from my pack and swept the forest with it. I stopped. In an arbor formed by vine-tree branches, I saw part of the Hog's head and forequarters at a range of 523 meters. "He's on his feet," I said.

"Where?" Rasmussen gasped.

"One shot," I promised. I jacked the robotic higher and once more focussed the sight. I threw the main switch. The weapon hummed. The barrel moved slightly upward and to the left. The robotic made a spitting noise.

Even as the thud of the exploding pellet reached us two seconds later, I was choking, "A-an antelope, or something! It jumped in front of the Hog. The pellet hit it! That's the only way a robotic can miss—if something covers the target. This is the first—"

Rasmussen laughed. "Perhaps will die from my bullets," he chuckled. "Go look for him, if not afraid. Incidentally, it is unlawful for an alien to kill game on Maggie."

I searched the trees with the ranger, but saw no life except a flock of birds disturbed by the blast. I shouldered my pack, picked up the hisser, and stalked down the hill into the vines.

Rasmussen called, "Be back in two hours. Must return before dark."

STUMBLING over roots and pushing through low tunnels, I tried to reach the clearing in which the Hog had first been sighted. At a sound behind me, I whirled and almost hung myself in a looping tendril. Betty Toal, carrying a slender firearm,

moved gracefully in my wake.

"What's wrong with that old man?" I snarled at her. "Is he jealous because he's the great hunter, and I'm after the Hog? I'd have killed the Hog if he hadn't ruined my first try."

Toal said, "He's proud. He's vain about his hunting. I think he hates the Hog too much to let him escape. Of course, he protested to the Jury about calling an outside hunter. Probably resents you."

"Yes," I said. "You'd best go to the tractor with him. I don't like hunting on foot in a forest. I never do it if I can use another method."

"No, you need a guide, although Ordinances 37, 38, and 42 forbid a Maggiese female to enter a forest with a male alien."

We smiled at each other. "I'm sorry about this morning," I said. "I didn't intend any insult to the memories of your family and friends. I didn't realize what the Hog had done to you."

"It's all right, Kinlock."

"We'd best go on. You'll be about as safe with me as anywhere, if the Hog circles."

"No, this way."

Toal dodged in front of me and undulated rapidly through the vines. I kept tripping and catching my head or the hisser barrel in the tendrils. We, at length, stepped through an arch into a clearing.

A horde of striped toothies swarmed around a clay bank that had been excavated until cross sections of tunnels were exposed. A hundred little eyes stared. One or two toothies even stood erect on hind feet for a better view. One rodent squeaked. Others answered. Some went into holes in the bank, and others vanished among the matted red flowers that filled the clearing.

I examined the great cloven depressions left in the damp ground by the Hog's feet. "He was rooting for toothies," I said. "The Jury claimed he has no part in this planet's bionomics, but he's checking the toothie population." I glanced at Toal and said, "Don't start glaring like that again. I'll finish the Hog for you. He's probably the only one surviving, since the Jury says he isn't—and one old boar can't carry on the species."

I followed the footsteps of the Hog across the clearing and into the silent green corridors. Infrequent glimpses of the sky revealed darkening clouds sweeping up from the horizon. Something rumbled in the distance. "Thunder," Toal said.

Soaked with perspiration generated by the humid heat and by anticipation of meeting the Hog, I tiptoed around a vine trunk and almost stepped in the mess made by the robotic pellet that should have blasted the

Hog. Toal said, "A jumpalong."

The animal, a brown thing with four horns, had been blown nearly in half. The flesh around the wound had turned purple. "Stay away from it," I warned. "Nitrobenzene is potent stuff."

The Hog had departed through a tunnel of his own manufacture, penetrating the vines in a straight line for fifty meters. As I moved into the hole, lightning bathed the forest floor in green light, and thunder crackled. "Do you have rain every day all summer?" I complained.

"Yes," Toal said, "but this is only spring."

Big raindrops splattered against the canopy of leaves. I said, "Do you want to go back? A thunderstorm's not an ideal time to hunt."

"You'd have a cold trail by tomorrow. The Hog may be badly wounded."

I breathed deeply and peered down the dim tunnel. "You watch the rear," I said, whispering for some reason.

Lightning flickered through the vegetation in nerve-racking patterns. The leaves no longer turned the rain. I told myself I was unhinged to hunt the Hog, when hearing him would be impossible, but I walked slowly forward.

The Hog's tunnel broke into a path marked by his hoofs. The

path curved back and forth, for about a kilometer, and led to rocky ground above a tumbling stream. I removed a folded robe from my pack, shook it out, and gave it to Toal. "Put that on," I said. "You'll be soaked if we go out there."

"But what about you?"

"I'm already wet, and very little of it's rain."

The lightning had subsided before the increasing downpour, but, as I walked from the woods, I cringed in a reflex I had acquired after seeing a man struck on a bare plain. Water ran off my sunhat and saturated my oversuit. My non-skid boots slipped on the wet rocks.

A grumbling noise reached me through the rain. I was hoping to dismiss it as thunder, but Toal said, "The Hog."

"Where is he?" I whispered. Toal shook her head. I studied the woods, then turned back to the creek. Old, decayed stumps, piles of rotting brush and limbs, and clumps of young trees spotted the ground across the stream. Gaudy flowering plants grew in broad patches of yellow, red, and orange. Beneath the pelting rain, the warm ground extruded a low, slowly swirling mist.

A SHRILL screech echoed distantly. The hisser jumped to my shoulder, but I saw no target. Toal said, "The tractor whistle.

Rasmussen wants to go."

"He said two hours," I objected. "It hasn't been two hours."

"May think hunting is useless in the rain."

"I suppose so," I sighed. "No traces on these rocks. That mist is covering the stream. I have a sniffer, but it won't pick up much from wet ground. You lead, but, if you see the Hog, drop flat to give me a shot."

We sloshed back into the wiggling path. Again the tractor whistle shrieked. We walked faster, slipping in the mud. Somewhere, the Hog grunted. We trotted.

As we reached the tunnel in the vinetrees, Toal stopped. "Listen!" she said. "Starting the tractor! Cannot leave us!"

She ran. I splashed and slid on her track, but she had a fifty meter lead before I reached the dead jumpalong. My running slowed to a tottering shuffle. I breathed in painful wheezes, and lost my sunhat, and did not bother to retrieve it.

I panted into the clearing where we had first seen the Hog. Toal waited near the clay bank. The entrenched toothies peeped from their holes. I thought we were in the wrong place, since the red flowers were now orange, but then I saw that the rain had somehow soaked the color from them, forming red

pools over the clearing.

"I lost your cape," Toal said. Her breathing was only slightly rapid, but I gasped as if I had been strangled.

The Hog grunted. He grunted five times while Toal and I stood immobile. The grunting ascended to a squealing sound like, "Kyieel uhoo! Keel uhoo! Keel oo Keenlogh!"

For the first time on Planet Maggie, I shivered with cold. "Did you, did you hear th-that?" I stuttered. "What goes on? Can the Hog actually talk?"

"Talk?"

"He said, 'Kill you, Kinlock.'"

"How could he?" Toal said. "How could he know your name?"

"He's been listening," I said. Then I snickered hysterically. "That's ridiculous. Rasmussen thinks the Hog may be a marsupial, and marsupials don't talk. He hasn't any tool-grasping organs either."

Toal slogged into the vine woods. "No use running any farther," she said. "The tractor sounds as if it's half way to Joetropolis."

X: SIXDAY EVENING

THE RAIN stopped a half hour after Joe's Sun set. Betty Toal and I were a long distance from Joetropolis and the Young

Farmer School. Although Toal had insisted upon carrying the hisser in addition to her firearm, I was ready to collapse under the combined mass of my pack and the robotic, which Rasmussen had left exposed to the rain.

The Hog moved with us. Where he stalked remained impossible to tell. The darkening of night amplified the ventriloquial quality of his grunting. At times, he seemed ahead of us, occasionally he walked on either side, but, most often, he trailed close behind.

"Are you sure there's only one?" I panted. "Sounds like a herd."

In the darkness, the Hog laughed. That is, he rapidly grunted, "Huh, huh, huh, huh!"

I stopped in the middle of the dirt road and squinted at indistinct shapes. A field bordered the road on one side, and an area of fresh stumps and scattered vinetrees, the other. "Do you have any night goggles?" I asked.

"No," Toal said.

"I may have a light in my pack."

"No light! The Hog will charge it. He tracks by scent, but has poor sight."

I imagined I saw a great shape in the brush. "Let's climb a tree," I said. "There's a big vine. We'll wait until someone comes for us."

"No one will search. Ordinance 921 forbids anyone to go outside the walls at night."

"Fine. Rasmussen deliberately left us for the Hog. I can understand he may dislike me, but why you?"

"Eeet oo Keenlogh!" the Hog squealed, almost shattering my eardrums.

"The hisser!" I yelled. I dropped the heavy robotic in the mud, jerked the hisser from Toal's arms, and shoved the woman behind me. I turned on the light under the barrel.

The Hog filled the road thirty meters away. His back was at least four meters above the road.

The Hog had only one glinting red eye. The other side of his head contained a ghastly socket. Half of one ear was missing, and his lower left tusk was broken. The bizarrely up-swept, upper left tusk was twice the length of the right. Reddish bristles grew, like weeds among rocks, between the bony plates covering his creased hide. With snout touching the ground, he stood on cloven hoofs too small for his oily, swelling body. A stifling stench emanated from him. He moved.

"Run!" I barked. Pellets swished from the hisser's barrel. Some actually rebounded from the Hog's neck. I shot at the charging monster's skull. The hisser pinged empty. The Hog's

tusks slashed upward.

I squawked like a space-happy maniac as a tusk ripped into my oversuit. I tumbled into the air and bounced through the branches of the nearby vinetree.

Hanging stunned in a snarl of creepers, I heard sharp cracks from Toal's firearm. The Hog squealed in rage. "Run, Toal!" I wheezed. "He's pellet-proof!"

The Hog stopped squealing. Mud splashed and brush broke.

"Ube Kinlock," Toal cried, "where are you?" Her cries became a mourning wail. I heard her stumbling in the undergrowth.

"Up here," I groaned. "Up here."

"Oh! Don't move. May have broken bones. Found your lantern." A light flashed across the road and countryside, then moved up the tree. "Badly injured?" Toal called.

Dangling in the vines, I became aware that I throbbed and burned all over. "Don't think so," I said. "He tossed me."

The light swayed. Toal crouched on a broad, living rope slightly above me. She unclipped the light from the neck of her sack and held it close to me. "Anything broken?" she asked.

"I don't know," I moaned. "How can anything so big move that fast?"

"You are scratched and bruised." Toal pulled apart a

long rip in my oversuit. "Side is bleeding," she said. "Have to get you down."

"What about the Hog?"

"Ran. You hurt him, Kinlock. Blood on the road."

"Probably mine. A hundred pellets!" I sighed. "He kept coming."

"Said hissers won't stop him. Must cut that vine around your ankle."

Toal put her hand to the back of her neck and pulled it away clutching a small knife. She sawed at the vines. Far away, the Hog grunted, but the sounds had a new, bubbling quality. Toal said, "Going back to the swamp."

I said, "He can talk. He told me he would eat me."

XI: SIXDAY NIGHT

AT ABOUT 26:30 o'clock, according to Toal, we crawled under the electric wires across the road and reached the walls of Joetropolis. The Young Farmer School had refused to open its gates because of six different Ordinances.

Most of the clouds had cleared away, but the dark nebula hung dim and threatening overhead. While Toal searched for a signal button, I—a collapsing hulk of cuts, bruises, tatters, and disgust—sat in the road. With one foot, the Hog had wrecked ten

x-tops, three coupons worth of robotic. I had been unable to find the hisser. The only whole pieces of equipment that we recovered were the light, a water pump, the sniffer, one can of S-rations, and a tube of pellets.

Lights suddenly spotted us. A man loudly intoned, "Why break Ordinance 921?"

"This is Recessive Betty Toal and Alien Hunter Ube Kinlock," Toal said. "Open the gate!"

The man said, "Not till morning. The Hog might enter."

Toal said, "The Hog is in the swamp. Kinlock wounded him. Kinlock should see a doctor. We've walked seventeen miles. Throw us a rope, if you won't open the gate."

Then a voice that I recognized spoke. "Let them climb up," ordered the shuttle pilot, Olaf Ypsilanti. "Want to discuss this matter with them."

A mesh of wooden slats and plastic ropes clattered against the logs. "Let me help you, Kinlock," Toal said.

"I'm all right. You first," I said.

Toal slung her weapon and climbed up the net as if she had had no exercise for days. Ypsilanti's fleshy face appeared in the light. Roughly, he helped Toal over the sawtoothed parapet.

Slowly, I followed. No one assisted me at the top. I tore two new gashes in my ragged

oversuit, and my ankles turned under me when I dropped down to the walk.

Someone turned a searchlight and illuminated the six men and one woman standing on the planks. Ypsilanti gripped Toal's wrists in his big hands. "Why treat me this way, Betty?" he asked. "Were to marry next week. Am a strong, handsome Dominant. Any female Minimum should be proud Controls Council selected me for her."

"Turn loose, Ypsilanti!" Toal said.

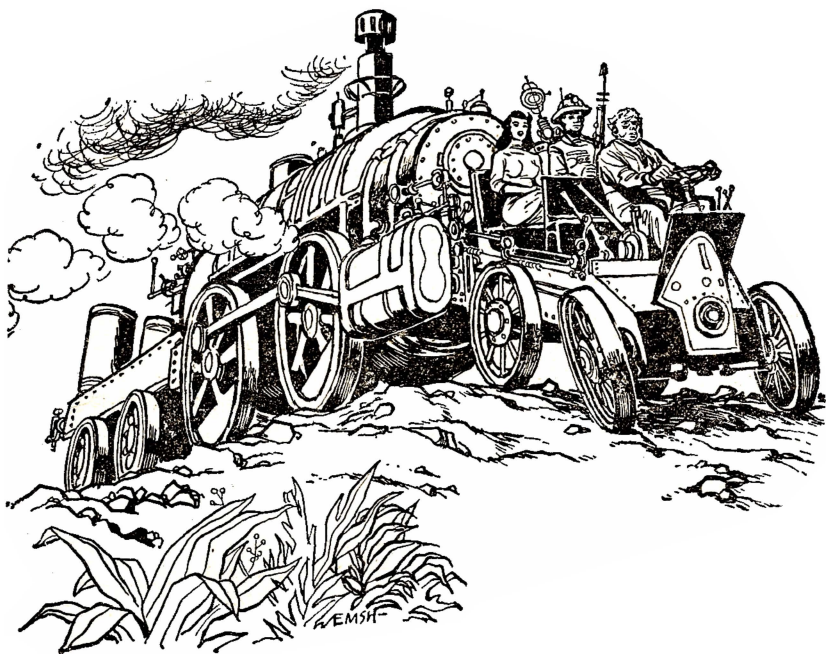
Ypsilanti said, "You imitate

the alien's ugly accent. Have schemed to be deported rather than marry me."

Toal said, "I'd cut my throat first."

Ypsilanti released her. His voice throbbed with anger. "Would not have you! Have been in the woods with an alien!" He put his open palm in her face and shoved. Toal slammed back against the logs.

Shocked by the shuttle pilot's brutality, I swayed to my feet and grabbed his shoulder. I said, "Don't—" and then Ypsilanti's clenched hand thudded against



my jaw. I flipped backward, slid on my shoulders, and stopped with my head hanging over the edge of the walk.

Although I had seen box fights in historical tridies and read of them in books, I had always supposed they belonged in mythology.

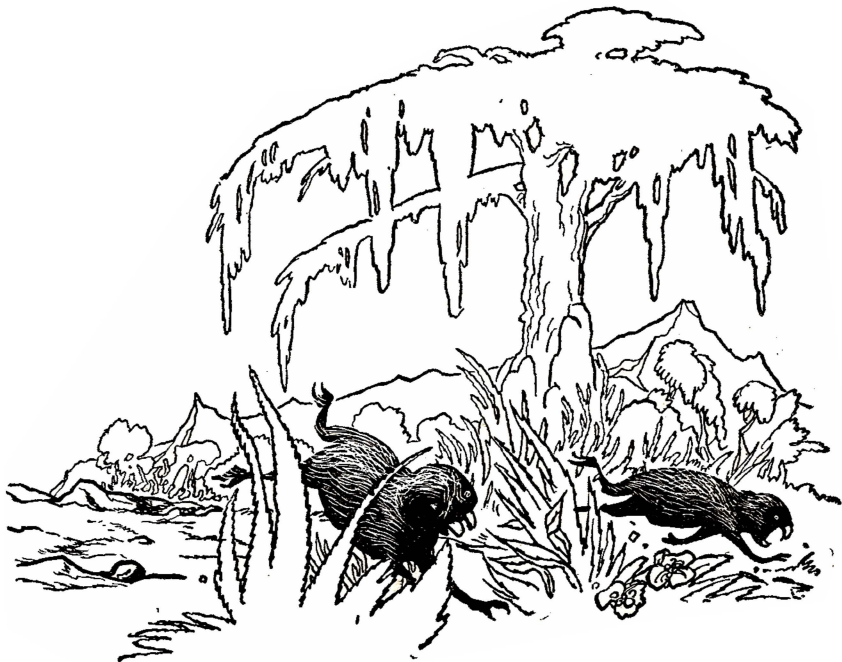
Ypsilanti said, "Galactic Government slave! You are not fit to walk on Maggie!"

It seemed that he had told me this before. I sat up. Betty Toal,

with knife in hand, struggled between two guards. Ypsilanti kicked me on the leg above the knee. I seized his ankle, jerked, and let go. Yelling, the shuttle pilot toppled from the wall.

"Good! Good!" Toal cried. Blood ran in two streams from her nose. One of the guards had her knife.

Ypsilanti, covered with mud, ran up a flight of steps farther down the walkway and stalked toward us. "Hold him!" he com-



manded. "Will beat his head off!"

A man emerged from the shadows behind the pilot and said, "Ypsilanti, stop."

Ypsilanti whirled. He stood rigid and said, "Maximum Macready, the alien tried to murder me!"

"Nonsense. Saw you knock him down. You should not be here. Have no authority over the guards."

Maximum of the Jury Qasim Pierre Macready glared at the guards. "Release them," he said. "Alien Kinlock has been hired to kill the Hog. Must not interfere." Macready looked closely at my cuts and ripped clothing. He asked, "Any success, Alien Kinlock? Rasmussen thought the Hog got you. Came for help. Tractor had trouble, due to neglect by Farmer Yuko. Rasmussen did not reach the city before sunset. Shoot the Hog?"

Toal answered, "Kinlock shot him, Maximum. He risked his life. The Hog crawled to the swamp. We expect to find his body tomorrow."

Ypsilanti said, "She should not go with this alien."

"Has Alien Status," Macready said. "What she does is not important. If the Hog is indeed dying, is great news. Will be best proved. Kinlock, go to Doctor Izard."

Macready turned and left. I

stared at Ypsilanti and the guards. They returned my scowl. Toal and I headed for the steps.

As we went down, Toal said, "You fixed Ypsilanti! If Macready hadn't come, you would have really beaten him. Ypsilanti's needed it for a long time."

"How's your nose?" I asked.

"It's almost stopped bleeding. Turn at the next corner to the doctor."

"You go about your nose. I want to ask Rasmussen a few things."

"I'll come, too," Toal said. "I'd like to watch."

She guided me through dimly illuminated streets, until we reached the wall again. We climbed the ramp and started across the steel bridge leading to Rasmussen's rooms. Something barricaded the walk.

I turned my light on the obstruction. Two toothies blinked from the top of my own baggage. Rasmussen's windows were dark.

XII: SEVENDAY MORNING

AT ELEVEN o'clock, mid-morning by Maggiese time, I leaned stiffly against the log wall of the apartmented building in which Betty Toal lived. I watched the Minimums, and Dominants, and a few Maximums pass. Some pointedly ignored me, while others gazed

with hostility. Although all were potential meals for the Hog, they showed no gratitude for my attempts to help them. Sighing, I felt my more prominent bruises and wondered if I should wear a white oversuit for hunting. It was the only light clothing I had left, and I refused to consider Maggiese costume.

Astride a pedal-operated vehicle, Betty Toal rode into the street. The machine resembled the tricycles, but had five wheels with the two rear ones supporting a seat. "Low, Kinlock!" she called. "Come aboard the pentacycle."

"High, Toal. Wouldn't they give you two? I can't let you haul me all over the planet."

"Not hard with the gears."

I piled a firearm, a pouch of shells, and what remained of my pack on the rear seat and climbed in between the wheels. "That redheaded Farmer, Yuko, brought me a firearm," I said, indicating the heavy weapon with two barrels. "He said he borrowed it while Rasmussen was out."

Toal looked at the weapon and said, "If it doesn't knock you down, you'll be all right."

"Wonder why Yuko did it," I said. "Except for you, he's the first person here who's been friendly."

"You look alike, slightly. Be careful of that box of dynamite."

Toal stood on the pedals, gripped the steering bar, and propelled the pentacycle down the street. She wore a fresh green and brown sack, but no leggings.

As we swished through the gate, I said, "What's dynamite?"

"Explosive. Has nitroglycerin in it. Rasmussen killed two pigs with it. We can throw some at the Hog, if he's alive."

"He probably will be," I said. The riding was smoother and much quieter than in the steam tractor. "Explain this about looking alike," I said. "It's worried me since those emigrants boarded the Ap-GG-12C."

"Oh, that." Toal settled back on the saddle. She explained, "You and Yuko look alike. I've heard that unrelated people throughout the Explored Galaxy may look alike. They're called doubles. Even the Hog is similar to real pigs. When Joe Nordo settled Planet Maggie, decided everyone should be the same. Advertised for fifty years. Out of the billions in the Explored Galaxy, selected three hundred colonists who looked like him. Everyone on Maggie is descended from them."

"I see," I said, beginning to experience a new form of motion disturbance — pentacycle sickness. "I suspected new genetic discoveries, but it's only applied coincidence. If—"

Toal braked the pentacycle so

quickly that I almost knocked her from the saddle with my head. "Tractor tracks," she said. Toal dismounted and studied the interlaced wheel marks on the damp road. "Must have been Rasmussen," she decided. "He has the only one with twelve wheels."

I said, "He's trying for the first shot again."

Toal dropped to hands and knees with her face close to the dirt. "Towing something," she said. "I don't know what. Something with two big wheels."

"You can see all that?"

"Why, yes, can't you?" Toal climbed back into the saddle.

As we started, I mumbled, "Without my instruments, I can't see anything."

The absurd cap that replaced my lost sunhat protected my face, but my neck and ears slowly fried. The breeze blew hot and searing against me. Joe's Sun burned in the deep blue sky, and the temperature climbed astonishingly.

XIII: SEVENDAY AFTERNOON

THE Baby Maggie River, three hundred meters wide, gurgled and splashed over water-pocked rocks in its race to reach the Joe Junior Swamp and filter through to the sea. The cliffs, a ragged wall of dark gray rock tilted until the strata were verti-

cal, lined the opposite bank.

Toal and I stood at the end of a track passing down between high rocks to the river. Here the pontoon bridge had once spanned the current. For two square kilometers around us, the trees had been cut and not replanted. The place was a depressing scene of gulleys, brush, stumps, and decaying limbs and sticks. A species of thorny, creeping vine with blue-green foliage predominated in reclaiming the devastated woodland.

"Surely the Hog didn't swim," Toal said.

Dehydrated and soaked with perspiration that would not evaporate, I mopped my streaming face with my sleeve. "He must have left the trail somewhere," I said.

We had again failed to find the hisser near the vinetree, but the Hog's hoofprints, usually following paths and roads, had led us to the river. I unreeled the cable of the sniffer until its nose dangled just above the ground. With the dial in my hand, I explored the edge of the road.

"That brush heap looks broken," Toal said.

I walked in the direction that she pointed. A labyrinth of stone lay along the bank. Heat waves simmered over the ground, and my feet burned in spite of thick boot soles. I reached the brush.

The dial of the sniffer lighted, and the needle turned to the right. "We're on!" I said. "There's more blood. He was still bleeding after running this far. He must be dead, after all. You stay there with the pentacyle, and—"

"Had this argument yesterday," said Toal. "I'll bring part of the dynamite and go with you."

Following the pointing needle, I tripped along through the brush. Dry sticks popped under my feet, and the creepers quickly reduced my oversuit legs to rags. The trail angled across a bend in the river and moved into the shade of a vinetree grove. At first, there was open space between the trees, so that we again reached the river without difficulty. Small holes dotted the dirt beneath an overhanging rock. Toothies swarmed in and out of the burrows and squeaked excitedly.

"Some dynalene might help here," I said. "These things will eat this peninsula bare some day."

"Dynamite," Toal said. "Let them."

The sniffer led us deeper into the vine grove. The round, fringed leaves meshed into a roof that stopped the sunlight and left us walking in a sickly, greenish gloom. Abruptly, the leaves closed down to the earth,

forming a rough wall of vegetation across the woods. The mouth of a tunnel opened in the mass.

Toal whispered, "The Hog goes to the swamp through there. We set traps at other tunnels. He always avoided them. It's black as a cave inside."

The sniffer pointed directly to the tunnel. Cloven hoofs had indented the ground. I said, "You go back, and—"

"No! I'll throw dynamite."

"All right. Be careful where you throw it." I grinned sickly. "Is there any way around these vines?"

"Could circle to cleared ground. Would only lead to the swamp. Can't walk in the swamp."

I put the sniffer in my pack and clipped the light to my belt. I tiptoed into the tunnel. Toal followed.

The ground was slippery underfoot, and the amount of light filtering through the massed leaves swiftly lessened. The tunnel curved gently from side to side. One hundred meters from the entrance, I could not see and turned on the light.

The Hog grunted. The ground vibrated.

Raising the heavy firearm to my shoulder, I waited. "Keen-logh!" the Hog squealed. The sound of his breathing reached me. The oily stench of him came

through the tunnel.

Pausing between each step to listen, I moved forward. The tunnel twisted sharply and then branched. Each branch again divided. The Hog grunted, "Huh, huh, huh, huh!"

I moved to the right toward the sound. Down the leafy corridor, a red spot glittered. It blinked from sight before I could aim.

I reached another branch in the tunnel, and my light chose that moment to go out. I stood in total darkness, remembering that I had failed to install a new generator.

"Go back," I whispered in terrified accents. "Light's gone. Toal?"

"Here."

"Go back." Walking sideways, I began a fumbling withdrawal. I brushed against the invisible vines, slipped, and almost fell. "Keep together," I said. "Are you there, Toal?"

I retreated about twenty more steps and said, "Grab my belt, or we'll be separated."

Toal did not answer. The Hog did. He squealed, "Tooaaal!"

"Toal!" I yelled.

"Over here," she said from a distance. "Where are you?"

THE HOG crashed and grunted along the tunnel. I found myself running through the darkness toward a dim, green patch.

"Hide, Toal!" I called. I did not pass her. I reached a part of the tunnel in which I could see. I heard the Hog behind me, but did not look back.

Sprinting as if I were a good runner in splendid condition, I reached the open grove. I stopped and turned. The Hog emerged from the wall of vines. Coagulated blood caked his neck and head. His single usable eye blinked in the light. He charged, but he took evasive action, swerving to either side.

In my excitement and unfamiliarity with the weapon, I pulled both triggers of the firearm. The twin barrels discharged with a deafening blast. The recoil knocked me down. A vine burst where the projectiles passed through it.

The Hog galloped over me. One sharp hoof brushed my face. As the Hog turned, I practically ran up a vine tree.

Ten meters above the ground, I sat in the springy branches and breathed hoarsely. The Hog sniffed, twisted his short neck, and fixed his eye on me. "Eet oo, Keenlogh!" he grunted.

The Hog struck at the vine trunk with his forefeet. Rearing slightly and raising his front legs, he worked his way up the vines until his body, which must have weighed nearly fourteen metric tons, stood at a sixty degree angle. The vines bent and

cracked. The Hog's three whole tusks gnashed close to my feet.

I crawled higher and found a vine rope hanging over open ground and leading to another trunk. Dangling first from one hand and then the other, I started across. My arms were ready to pull loose, before I reached the other vinetree and clamped myself to it. The Hog had difficulty in once more putting all feet on the dirt.

Through an opening, I glimpsed the deforested area where we had left the pentacycle. I could see Toal nowhere, nor could I now see the tunnel.

The Hog approached my new refuge, but, instead of rearing, began tearing at the thick stems with his tusks. I became aware that my face bled where his hoof had brushed it.

The Hog worked energetically, ripping and rooting. His armored sides heaved with his panting. He sweated profusely, and the end of his ugly snout dripped with moisture.

The trunks supporting me sagged. I tried to devise some plan, some sure method of escape, but my mind was a panicky jumble. Then I recalled that boring booklet, *Initial Experiments in Earthian Swine* (*Sus scrofa*) *Production on Freesphere*. The Hog was not of *Sus scrofa*, but he had similar traits. And I had no other plan.

"Yaaa!" I yelled. "You stinking pig! Climb up! I'll kick your snout off!"

The Hog rumbled, backed off, and then ran forward. He lifted his forequarters into the air and smashed into the tangle, temporarily trapping himself. I almost fell from the swaying vines. I climbed down past one of the Hog's protruding feet and dropped to the ground.

I looked for the firearm I had lost, but the Hog was breaking loose. I turned and ran the other way, out of the grove, past the toothie colony, and away from the river toward the open field.

I trotted into the wilderness of rocks, stumps, brush, and creepers. Joe's Sun seared my head, which no longer wore a cap. Heat waves quivered across the blighted land. Heat simmered from exposed rocks. I looked back to see the Hog emerging from the trees.

Faster, I ran, jumping gullies and struggling through patches of thorny creepers. Already I regretted trusting my stiffened muscles and poor running ability to this race. The Hog pursued with incredible speed for an animal his size.

I tried to hurdle a rock, struck the top with one foot, and rolled down a slope. When I again ran, one knee did not function well. My lungs burned, and I made sounds like the tractor.

The Hog had closed the distance between us to twenty meters. He panted loudly, and his whole body glistened wetly.

For agonizing minutes, I moved at the fastest gait I could muster, but it seemed slower than walking. At the top of a low hill, I saw the pentacycle not more than one hundred meters away.

When I started down the slope, the Hog's wheezing warned me. Abruptly, I changed direction. The great boar brushed past me. He staggered down the gentle hill. Spasms jerked his huge body. By the time he had turned, I had flanked him, and, burning unsuspected energy, I ran for the parked pentacycle.

THE HOG charged, almost blindly, forcing me toward the rocks beside the river. The rocks were incinerators in the heat of Joe's Sun. The hot ground burned through my boots. I flopped into a narrow gap. The Hog sniffed at the opening, then moved away. I crawled into the warm shade of an overhanging boulder and lay groaning and gasping.

Swaying in the blazing sunlight, the Hog vomited. He collapsed ponderously on his side. His legs twitched. He struggled to raise his massive head, but his snout fell in the dirt.

I crawled out of the rocks and

reeled toward the pentacycle. A toothie scooted from beside the front wheel, and two others watched from the concealment of a creeper.

Several times, I had heard that the Hog seldom stayed in the sunlight, and the booklet, *Initial Experiments in Earthian Swine (Sus scrofa) Production on Free-sphere*, had said that swine were susceptible to heatstroke. I trembled at the risk I had taken, but I felt a sense of peace I had not known on Planet Maggie.

One thousand x-tops, fifty coupons, the Jury would pay me for killing the Hog, the last animal I would kill for money. My hunting career had reached a successful end. An unhectic life on Mother Earth awaited me.

I suspected that I was becoming delirious in the heat. When I reached the pentacycle, I opened the dynamite box and took one tube in each hand. The tubes were fitted with time fuses.

The Hog breathed spasmodically. I warily neared the heaving mountain of flesh, uncertain of the dynamite's power, but calculating that two detonations near the creature's head would be enough.

Opening his one good eye, the Hog looked at me. His tusks grated together. Weak noises came from his mouth. "Uhdoo nuut keel!"

Sixday evening, I had been

momentarily convinced that the Hog could speak, but had found it hard to accept that faculty in a swinish animal without grasping organs. However, appearance did not always indicate intellectual ability, and the Hog's skull contained ample space for a large brain. Today, now that I recalled his noises, I knew he had again threatened to eat me.

"Uhdoo nut keel, Keenlough," the Hog grunted. He seemed to be asking for his life.

Perhaps I did not feel so strange as would a man who had never conversed with a nonhuman intelligence. Two of my close friends were Triangularians. I said, "What can I do but kill you? You helped kill 238 people."

The Hog made sounds. With great difficulty, I translated his answer as a question. "Is wrong to kill and eat? Men kill and eat. No way to leave this land. Eat toothies. Are hard to catch. Little other food but Maggieese."

The Hog closed his eye and wheezed through his open mouth. I argued with myself.

Galactic Government specified the correct procedure when an intelligent species was discovered. All possible efforts toward peaceful contact and negotiation should be made, however strange or dangerous the species might be. The discoverer could not molest the creatures on his own

responsibility. Technically, the Hog was a murderer, but GG renounced the ancient belief that he who kills must be killed, and considered that murderers suffered from a curable illness.

Betty Toal—if she lived—and all other Maggieese would rejoice if I dynamited the Hog. I would receive my fee. No one would realize the Hog had been anything but a man-eating brute. Centuries might pass before GG zoologists examined the giant swine of Planet Maggie, if, indeed, others existed beyond the peninsula. The Hog would probably die of heatstroke, whatever I did.

With some surprise, I found that my pack remained on my shoulders, although it dangled by a single strap. I pulled the water pump from its pocket, walked to the river, and threw in the intake hose. Uncoiling the line, I moved back toward the Hog. The hose was too short, but I set the nozzle for maximum force and, remembering instructions in the booklet, sprayed water over the Hog's head.

The liquid revived him until he could push himself to a grotesque sitting position with his front feet. I shot water into his mouth and said, "Did you catch the woman in the tunnel?"

"Nooo," the Hog answered.

"You killed Toal," I said, dropping the hose and once more

filling my hands with dynamite.

"Nooo," the Hog repeated. With a mouth unsuited for speech, he laboriously made a proposal. If I would spare him, he would attempt to leave the peninsula, going around the swamp to the coast and risking the currents and sea life in an effort to swim to the main continent.

With my finger on a dynamite fuse, I considered the plan. The Hog swayed to his feet.

Something fiendish screeched overhead. An explosion thundered in the rocks beside the river. Fragments whined through the hot air. The Hog squealed. I dropped prone and wriggled into a depression.

A second explosion rent the ground in front of me, showering me with dirt and brush. The Hog tried to run. His weakened legs quivered under him.

The third blast occurred between his front hoofs.

I crawled into a gully and, idiotically clutching the dynamite tubes, put my arms over my head. Tensed for more destruction, I lay there for several minutes. When I looked up, five or six toothies ran past my face.

Wearily, I stood erect. The Hog's remains lay in a pond of blood. Toothies scuttled out of the brush and the rocks and moved around the carcass. Having seen enough nonhuman in-

telligence for the present, I refused to believe the rodents were dancing in gleeful victory.

I stumbled off toward the vinetrees to learn the fate of Betty Toal, but she peeped over a rock. "You killed the Hog," she said. "What was that screeching?"

I stopped and breathed deeply. Toal said, "Was lost in the side tunnels."

"No," I murmured, "I didn't kill the Hog."

XIV: SEVENDAY EVENING

LONG SHADOWS fell across a device on a hill two kilometers from the river. The thing was a large firearm with a heavy barrel about three meters long. The barrel rested on wooden supporting and trailing pieces and projected from between two high wheels. Rasmussen lay with his fat right leg crushed and twisted under a wheel.

The old hunter shook an optical instrument at Betty Toal and me. We were wet from the usual daily thunderstorm, which had delayed our search for the killer of the Hog. "Blasted him!" Rasmussen groaned. "Take this cannon off me! Have waited hours. Why did you not come?"

I grasped two spokes and pushed with what little energy remained in my depleted body, but I could not tilt the ponder-

ous firearm. I said, "Can you drive his tractor over here, Toal? You can tow the canner off."

"Not enough pain for you?" Rasmussen gasped. "Use a lever. Lift the wheel."

"Cut a pole," Toal said and drew a knife.

Rasmussen continued to rave. "Where is gratitude? I saved you! Could not kill him by spraying his head."

I said, "You almost blasted me. Yesterday, you left us out here."

"Did as the old books instruct," Rasmussen said. "Bracketed the Hog with two shells. Third round killed him! Forgot the recoil that time. Cannon broke my leg." The old man's brown face had turned a sickly, greenish white.

"Where did you get this canner, uh, cannon?" I said.

Rasmussen moaned, tried to sit up, and sank back on his elbows. "Is what you saw when grounding in the shuttle."

Toal brought a stout pole, and we piled rocks for a fulcrum. I pushed one end of the pole through the wheel spokes and under the axle.

Rasmussen said, "Maximum Eijkman had it built in secret. Could have shot the Hog weeks ago. Eijkman had dreams of changing our government into something strange. Himself as head."

Toal and I threw our weight on the lever. The wheel lifted. Rasmussen crawled sideways. We eased the cannon to the ground.

I said, "Galactic Government forbids private planets to make such weapons."

Rasmussen gasped, "Nonsense. Was required to protect us from native life."

XV: FOURDAY AFTERNOON

As JOE'S SUN moved behind rising clouds toward the horizon, an odd little procession walked from Joetropolis. Toal said, "The Jury still refused to pay anything?"

"Yes," I said. "I told them again that Rasmussen wouldn't have killed the Hog if I hadn't lured him into the open. They wouldn't pay even part of my fee, and they wouldn't reimburse me for the equipment I've lost. They quoted Ordinances and said I stole a firearm and a box of dynamite. They hinted that I broke Rasmussen's leg."

Toal said, "You'll make other hunts on other worlds. Their people will reward you."

"I suppose so," I sighed.

Ahead of us, former Foreman Maximum Eijkman, now reduced to Recessive—Alien Status, stalked in injured majesty. Two couples and their Alien children followed us.

Against black thunderclouds,

the shuttle, *Joe Nordo III*, pointed to the sky but appeared incapable of rising above the surface. Somewhere in space and light-hours distant, the astralplane, Ap-GG-12C, approached the orbital rendezvous.

Farmers leaned on their primitive rotor tillers and watched us pass. Several, swinging sticks and shovels, pursued a swarm of toothies. Hundreds of toothies squeaked around the shed at the edge of the spacefield.

Eijkman climbed the chain ladder into the shuttle. As the four men and women helped their children climb, I looked into Toal's blue eyes and said, "Uh, Toal—I mean, Betty. I've rather enjoyed Planet Maggie, in spite of a lot of things. I admire you, Toal. That is, I've never seen another woman quite like you. Your bravery and, uh, all that. What I'm trying to say is, well, you're a hunter, and it looks as if I'll keep on being a hunter. You don't know anyone in the Explored Galaxy. Except

me, uh—that is, would—"

Preliminary raindrops spangled the tarnished fuselage of the shuttle. I wiped my face with my sleeve and said, "Doreen, and Laurinda, and Celestine would like you, I'm sure, and you'll like them. They're one of the happiest groups—most of the time, at least. Yes, uh, I'm sure they would approve if—"

"Who are Doreen, Laurinda, and Celestine?" Toal asked.

"Why, they're my wives," I explained. "Out in the Explored Galaxy, almost everyone has—"

Toal's clenched fist struck me squarely in the mouth. She whirled and ran up the ladder.

I spat out a tooth that, anyway, had not been very successfully transplanted. I crawled through the rain, up the swaying ladder, and the first symptoms of spacesickness wrenched my stomach.

Shuttle Pilot Ypsilanti waited on the first deck. He said, "Ordinance 419: Aliens ride the lowest deck."

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